Mies Van der Rohe

Presentation By: Kayla Cesta-M.
Life & Legend of Mies Van der Rohe

- Born Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe
- German-American Architect

Early in his life, Mies van der Rohe began experimenting with steel frames and glass walls. He was director of the Bauhaus School of Design from 1930 until it disbanded in 1933. He moved to the United States in 1937 and for twenty years (1938-1958) he was Director of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology.
The coherence of Mies’ work bases itself on a fundamental framework of intellectual as well as theoretical thought.

He did not study architecture at a University, it was in his professional practices that he developed a set of building principles that have become indispensable to understanding and practicing modern architecture.

“He found a perfect palace between technical precision and creative artistic freedom: This is what made Mies one of the great masters of 20th C. Architecture.”
German Pavilion
Barcelona, Spain. 1928-1929

- Precise & Clear Structure (Geometric and Technical Precision)
- Massive dense elements (ceiling planes) are supported with slender and visually light elements (columns).
- Play on materials within space creating contrast and texture.
German Pavilion

Architectural Makeup

- Open Spaces
- Ornamental Pools
- Partial roof supported by 8 cruciform steel chrome columns
- Walls are independent of the pillars, covered in honey gold onyx and green Tinos marble
- Full height windows are of buffered glass
- George Kolbe’s statue of a ballerina stands in one of the courtyards
German Pavilion
Interior

 Traits:

- Marble wall covering, wood veneer, window walls, steel columns, curtain walls, asymmetrical balance, and fluidity of space.
Mies Van der Rohe once said, “All great buildings are not the creation of individual personalities, but... pure vehicles of the will of the age; only in this way can they become symbols of their era.”
Lakeshore Drive Apartments

- Two 26 story multifamily housing towers located right on Lake Michigan near the City Center.
- Advancing building technologies were realized within the Lakeshore apartment buildings.
- Rising steel frame with floor to ceiling glass surfaces fit between horizontal steel supports.
- The towers are commonly referred to as ‘860’ (the address).
Lakeshore Drive Apartments

* Designed from outside to inside; permanent to temporary. The architecture evolved in the sequence of construction.

* Mies’ methods within the Lakeshore Drive Apartments went on the be the prototype for steel and glass skyscrapers worldwide.
Lakeshore Drive Apartments

- Towers appear to be floating above ground (common theme within Mies’ structures)

- Plan determined by a grid, steel columns placed at the intersections of the grid, it was a minimalist composition, with a complete lack of ornamentation, following Mies’ believe in “less is more.”

- Mies did not invent steel frame construction. Steel frame construction was a technical innovation of the time- Mies gave the steel frame aesthetic significance by simplifying it and placing emphasis on the grid

- Mies explains how the mullions do not violate his less is more philosophy in an 1960 interview "To me structure is something like logic. It is the best way to do things and express them". The mullions on his buildings reflect the inner structure and therefore give truth to the aesthetic of the building. The idea of truth in architecture aligns with the aesthetic and principals of the international style as taught at the Bauhaus.
Above all the intention of Bauhaus was to develop creative minds for architecture and industry and thus influence them so that they would be able to produce artistically, technically and practically balanced utensils.
Farnsworth House
1945 Country Retreat for Dr. Edith Farnsworth
Plano, Illinois

- Mies explored structural technologies and processes to create a home which blurs the distinction between interior and exterior.

- He focused on a relationship of parts that aimed to incorporate nature, the structure, and those who occupy it into a “higher unity,” as he put it.
The interior is composed of a single glass box. There are no walls, besides the single central core which houses the bathrooms and a utility room.

To the north of the core is the kitchen, which is a long rectangular built in, as well as an open hearth facing the living room. The bedroom faces the east for an optimal view of sunrises. There is a dinning area to the west. In response to Corbusiers’ Villa Savoy, the plan allowed for vehicles to drive right up to the pavilion.
Farnsworth House
1945 Country Retreat for Dr. Edith Farnsworth

- The Farnsworth House is one of the most complete refined statements of glass and steel architecture and Mies ever produced.

- “The vertical stacking of free floating horizontal planes have since become deeply embedded in modern design.”

- The steel frame allowed for an open environment. Mies used heavy steel sections, spaced widely apart with no visible cross-bracing, leaving an open appearance. Instead of standard bolting techniques, he opted for clean precise welds giving the appearance of a single continuous material.
Farnsworth House
1945 Country Retreat for Dr. Edith Farnsworth

- Other Materials Include: Travertine Floors, Wood (primavera for core walls, teak for built in wardrobe) and Plaster ceilings.

- “The range of colors is equally limited, to better set off the few artworks and carefully chosen items of furniture inside, and the framing of nature views outside.”
Mies: Furniture & Philosophical Legacy

- Mies began working with wooden furniture design in 1905. As technologies advanced and materials were re-defined, Mies followed suite. Mies produced multiple variations of the cantilever chair, now commonly known as tubular steel chairs. The most famous and desired of Mies’ furniture is known as the Barcelona Chair. It is composed of only two materials, a sweeping curved steel frame supporting leather webbing that holds tufted leather cushions.

- “LESS IS MORE” was Mies’ design philosophy. His collection is available through re-production by the Knoll Group, and is seen as an icon of Twentieth Century Modern.
Reflection Questions

(Group Conversation)

- What are some traits within Mies’ architecture, furniture, or design philosophies that classifies him as a Modernist Architect?

- What are some continuing themes / architectural practices you have seen incorporated within the works I have shown?
Study Questions

✶ Mies Van der Rohe is best known for his innovative uses of what two materials?

✶ Name two of Mies Van der Rohe’s influential works:

✶ Mies Van der Rohe’s philosophy about architecture and design was: “_____ __ ______.”

✶ What type of furniture was Mies most known for?

✶ What school of design was Mies once director of?
Information Sources

1000 Words on Mies Van der Rohe

Born Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe in 1886, he lived to age 83. Mies was a German-American Architect. Early in his life, Mies van der Rohe began experimenting with steel frames and glass walls. He was director of the Bauhaus School of Design from 1930 until it disbanded in 1933. He moved to the United States in 1937 and for twenty years (1938-1958) he was Director of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

The coherence of Mies’ work bases itself on a fundamental framework of intellectual as well as theoretical thought. He did not study architecture at a University, it was in his professional practices that he developed a set of building principles that have become key aspects to understanding and practicing modern architecture. “He found a perfect palace between technical precision and creative artistic freedom: This is what made Mies one of the great masters of 20th C. Architecture.”

My favorite work of architecture that he created was the German Pavilion with it’s precise & clear structure of geometric and technical precision. Massive dense elements (such as the ceiling planes) are supported with slender and visually light elements (like the columns). There is a play on materials within space creating contrast and texture.

Key aspects within the structure include: open spaces, ornamental pools, a partial roof supported by 8 cruciform steel chrome columns. Walls are independent of the pillars, covered in honey gold onyx and green Tinos marble. There are full height windows of buffered glass, and George Kolbe’s statue of a ballerina stands in one of the courtyards. Some traits of the interior include: Marble wall covering, wood veneer, window walls, steel columns, curtain walls, asymmetrical balance, and fluidity of space.

Mies Van der Rohe once said, “All great buildings are not the creation of individual personalities, but... pure vehicles of the will of the age; only in this way can they become symbols of their era.” A great example of the will of the age can be seen within the towering multifamily units Mies built in Chicago, a direct response to the new industrialized world.

Two 26 story multifamily housing towers located right on Lake Michigan near the City Center. Advancing building technologies were realized within the Lakeshore apartment buildings. They are composed of a rising steel frame with floor to ceiling glass surfaces fit between horizontal steel supports. The towers are commonly referred to as ‘860’ (the address).

Designed from outside-in; Mies focused primarily on the permanent and used that to guide the temporary. The architecture evolved in the sequence of construction. Mies’ methods within the Lakeshore Drive Apartments went on the be the prototype for steel and glass skyscrapers worldwide.
The 860 Towers appear to be floating above ground, which is a common theme within Mies’ structures- and can also be seen within the German Pavilion as well as the Farnsworth House which I will discuss next. The plan of the towers was determined by a grid. Steel columns were placed at the intersections of the grid. The structures were minimalist compositions, with a complete lack of ornamentation, following Mies’ believe in “Less is More.”

Mies did not invent steel frame construction. Steel frame construction was a technical innovation of the time; “Mies gave the steel frame aesthetic significance by simplifying it and placing emphasis on the grid. Mies explains how the mullions do not violate his less is more philosophy in an 1960 interview "To me structure is something like logic. It is the best way to do things and express them". The mullions on his buildings reflect the inner structure and therefore give truth to the aesthetic of the building. The idea of truth in architecture aligns with the aesthetic and principals of the international style as taught at the Bauhaus.”

“Above all the intention of Bauhaus was to develop creative minds for architecture and industry and thus influence them so that they would be able to produce artistically, technically and practically balanced utensils.”

The Farnsworth House is another innovative reflection of it’s time. Originally designed as a country retreat for Dr. Edith Farnsworth, Mies explored structural technologies and processes to create a home which blurs the distinction between interior and exterior. He focused on a relationship of parts that aimed to incorporate nature, the structure, and those who occupy it into a “higher unity,” as he put it.

The interior is composed of a single glass box. There are no walls, besides the single central core which houses the bathrooms and a utility room. To the north of the core is the kitchen, which is a long rectangular built in, as well as an open hearth facing the living room. The bedroom faces the east for an optimal view of sunrises. There is a dinning area to the west. In response to Corbusiers’ Villa Savoy, the plan allowed for vehicles to drive right up to the pavilion.

The Farnsworth House is one of the most complete refined statements of glass and steel architecture and Mies ever produced. “The vertical stacking of free floating horizontal planes have since become deeply embedded in modern design.” The steel frame allowed for an open environment. Mies used heavy steel sections, spaced widely apart with no visible cross-bracing, leaving an open appearance. Instead of standard bolting techniques, he opted for clean precise welds giving the appearance of a single continuous material. Other Materials Include: Travertine Floors, Wood (primavera for core walls, teak for built in wardrobe) and Plaster ceilings. “The range of colors is equally limited, to better set off the few artworks and carefully chosen items of furniture inside, and the framing of nature views outside.”
Along with mastering Modern Architecture, Mies had a passion in furniture design. Mies began working with wooden furniture design in 1905. As technologies advanced and materials were re-defined, Mies followed suite. Mies produced multiple variations of the cantilever chair, now commonly known as tubular steel chairs. The most famous and desired of Mies’ furniture is known as the Barcelona Chair. It is composed of only two materials, a sweeping curved steel frame supporting leather webbing that holds tufted leather cushions. “LESS IS MORE” was Mies’ design philosophy. His collection is available through re-production by the Knoll Group, and is seen as an icon of Twentieth Century Modern.